

## The Norwood Builder by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Chapter 4

**Author:** Daniel Barber

**Level:** Intermediate

**Age:** Young adults / Adults

**Time:** 45 minutes (60 with optional activity)

**Aims:** In this lesson, the students will:

1. read and discuss each other's possible story endings;
2. listen to find out how the story ends;
3. listen to take notes about details of the crime;
4. decide on a suitable punishment for the criminal (optional).

**Materials:** The 50-word summaries written by the class in the previous lesson; one copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (the first part of Chapter 4) and Track 2 (the rest of Chapter 4) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student

**Summary:** A young lawyer comes to Sherlock Holmes in desperate need of his help. John Hector McFarlane is the main suspect in the murder of Mr Jonas Oldacre, a successful builder from Norwood, near London. He claims he did not commit the crime. Holmes is interested and takes on his case. In Chapter 4, Holmes is feeling a lot more cheerful, believing he now understands the crime. With the help of Watson and the police, he sets a trap. It is not long before the police have the criminal in their custody and the story is clear for all. But how did Holmes figure it out?

### Preparation

Before the lesson, read through the 50-word summaries of the end of the story that the students wrote in the previous lesson. Check that the summaries are legible and reasonably accurate in terms of language use and coherence. Rewrite or correct any, if necessary.

### Reading and speaking

**Aim:** to discuss the class's theories about the ending of the story in preparation for the real ending

1. Put the students into the groups they were in for the final activity of the previous lesson. Hand out the 50-word summaries that they wrote in that lesson. Make sure that they have their names at the top of the summaries and give each group a number (1, 2, 3...). They should write this number at the top of the piece of paper.

2. Explain that they will now get a chance to read the other groups' story endings. Write the following on the board:

- How probable is the ending? (0 = not impossible; 5 = very probable)

- How entertaining is the ending? (0–5)
- a question for the group about their ending – \_\_\_\_\_?

Tell the groups that, for each ending, they should decide on the answers to the questions. Make sure each group has a secretary to make notes.

3. Organize a rotation of the summaries around the room so that each group passes its summary to an adjacent group. Give them a few minutes to read this summary and discuss the ending's probability and entertainment value, and to write a question about it. Make sure they have noted the group number. You will need to monitor the groups to check that everyone is involved and on task.

4. Have the groups pass the summaries on to the next group and so on until they have read as many summaries as possible within the time available.

5. Conduct whole-class feedback. Ask the groups to tell you which summary they found most probable. When you have determined which summary that is, have someone from the group responsible read it out to the whole class. Ask people why

## The Norwood Builder by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Chapter 4

they think it is the most probable. Make a note for yourself of the main ideas in their ending. Invite volunteers to ask the questions that they wrote for that ending. If you have time, ask the class about the ending they thought was least likely. Finally, ask the groups which was the most entertaining ending, inviting opinions and questions where appropriate.

### Listening and speaking

**Aim:** to review what happens next

1. Tell the class that they are now going to hear the final chapter of 'The Norwood Builder'. Before they do, they need to understand three words which may be new to them. Write the words on the board:

- straw
- shed
- bucket

Draw some straw and explain that it is the yellow stems of dried crops or grass. Then, draw a shed and explain that it is a small building, often found in gardens and made of wood, in which you store things such as garden equipment. Finally, draw a bucket and explain that it is a round open container with a handle, used for carrying water and substances such as sand. Invite suggestions as to the reason that these might be in the story but don't expect them to have many ideas.

2. Play Track 1. When the audio has finished, put the students into pairs. Hand out one copy of the worksheet to each pair. Point out the illustration and get them to talk about the picture, answering the questions underneath. They don't need to write their answers.

3. Conduct a whole-class review of the story. Nominate people to answer questions about the picture.

**Key:** 1. in the upstairs corridor in the Oldacre house; 2. The straw is to create a small fire. The water is to quickly put the fire out again.; 3. Jonas Oldacre; 4. He is coming out of his hiding place. He is frightened because he thinks the house is on fire.; 5. Holmes, Lestrade,

Watson and a policeman; 6. Holmes is pleased with himself because he has proved he was right. The others are surprised because they were not expecting Oldacre to suddenly appear.

4. Finally, ask the class why it is interesting that Holmes used fire to bring Oldacre out of hiding. (*It is ironic because Oldacre had used the timber-store fire to make people think that he was dead.*)

### Listening 2

**Aim:** to listen for gist for information about the crime

1. Explain that the class is going to listen now to the end of the story. Hand out the rest of the worksheets so that everyone has a copy. Direct them towards Listening 2 and play Track 2.

2. When the story has finished, let the students compare answers with a partner. Then, hand out copies of the transcript so that they can check their answers.

3. Go through the explanations for each question with the whole class.

**Key:** 1. Oldacre had made McFarlane seal the documents with a wax seal, ensuring that he had an impression of his fingerprint. He then made an impression of that impression to recreate the fingerprint. Then, he cut himself and used his own blood to make a bloody fingerprint on the wall.; 2. Holmes knew that Oldacre was hiding in the house if the blood-stained print was new. He measured the house by pacing up and down the garden, then pacing up and down the corridor. This way, he realized that the corridor was shorter than it should have been. Oldacre's building skills would have made putting in a hidden room easy for him.; 3. He owed a lot of money to people. If everyone thought he was dead, he wouldn't have to pay them back. He tried to take revenge on McFarlane's mother for refusing to marry him thirty years before by making it look like her son had committed the murder.; 4. Mr Cornelius is Jonas Oldacre. He created a false identity so that he could move to a

## The Norwood Builder by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Chapter 4

*different area and start life again, taking his money with him.*

### Speaking 3 (optional)

**Aims:** to consolidate understanding of the story and the character's attitudes; to finish with some fun

1. Form groups of three or four students. Explain that they are the judges deciding on Oldacre's punishment. First of all, they need to decide:

- what crime Oldacre committed;
- how serious it is;
- how severe the punishment should be.

Tell them that the punishment does not have to be imprisonment. Explain that, as the Lord Judge, you get to decide whose punishment Oldacre will receive and that you enjoy creative punishments as long as they are well justified! Give them a few minutes to discuss this in their groups.

2. Invite the groups to make their suggestions. Question their reasoning and make sure that they justify their choice of punishment. Discuss any interesting vocabulary or phrases that come up in the discussion. Finally, pronounce your sentence on Oldacre.

### Follow-up tasks

- The students write the following day's front-page news for *The Norwood Times*.
- The students find a television or radio adaptation of 'The Norwood Builder' online. (There are one or two decent adaptations on YouTube.) They watch / listen to it and compare it with the story that they have heard. How similar or different are the two versions?
- The students write a review of the story for a school magazine.

## The Norwood Builder

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle  
Chapter 4

### Listening and speaking

Listen to the first part of Chapter 4. Look at the picture. Answer the questions.



1. Where are the people in the picture?
2. What are the straw and bucket being used for?
3. Who is the old man?
4. What is he doing? Why?
5. Who are the other people in the corridor?
6. How do they feel? Why?

### Listening 2

Listen to the last part of the story. Make notes to answer the questions.

1. Where did the blood-stained fingerprint come from?

---

2. How did Holmes know about the hidden room?

---

3. Why did Oldacre do it?

---

4. Who is Mr Cornelius?

---

Read the transcript to check your answers.

## The Norwood Builder by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Chapter 4

Track 1

We left the garden and we went into the house. We went upstairs, where Holmes again paced up and down. But he was still looking cheerful.

‘Well it’s time to finish this case, Watson,’ he said after a few minutes. Holmes called down to Lestrade. ‘There is some straw in a shed in the garden,’ he told him. ‘I want one of your policemen to bring some of it up here, and ask the other one to bring a bucket of water up here too. And please come up yourself.’

A few moments later, the five of us were standing in the upstairs corridor. There was a pile of straw on the floor. Next to it was a bucket of water.

‘What are you going to do?’ Lestrade asked. He was obviously puzzled.

‘Watson is going to start a small fire, Lestrade,’ Holmes answered.

‘Is this your idea of a joke, Mr Holmes?’ the inspector said angrily.

‘This is not a joke, Lestrade, this is very serious,’ Holmes replied. ‘There has been a wicked crime and a man could be executed for murder. Now, when I tell you to shout, you must all shout “Fire!” Do you understand?’

I took some matches from my pocket and lit one, then I threw the burning match into the pile of straw. A few moments later it was alight and the smell of burning straw was everywhere.

‘Now!’ said Holmes.

‘Fire!’ we all shouted.

‘Again!’ said Holmes.

‘Fire!’ we all shouted again.

‘Once again!’ said Holmes.

‘Fire!’ we all shouted once more.

At first nothing at all happened. But then, something very surprising happened. A door opened in the wall at the end of the corridor. No one could have guessed that there was a door there. It had no handle or lock on the outside and just looked like part of the wall. A moment later, a frightened old man ran out of the door towards us. He looked like a rabbit running from its hole. Holmes caught him as he tried to run past us.

‘Throw the water on the straw now, Watson,’ Holmes said. ‘Inspector Lestrade, this is Mr Jonas Oldacre. I think that you want to talk to him. He’s been hiding in the little room behind that door all the time that you’ve been in the house.’

The old man had an unpleasant face, grey eyes and white hair. He looked worried, but he tried to laugh. ‘It was a joke,’ he said. ‘It was just a joke. Don’t be so serious about it.’

‘An innocent man was almost executed because of your joke,’ Lestrade replied. He told the two policemen to take the old man downstairs. ‘I’ll talk to him later,’ the inspector said.

‘Well, Mr Holmes,’ Lestrade said, when they had gone. ‘You’ve saved the life of an innocent man. It’s the best thing you’ve done yet! What was the **clue** that told you that the old builder was still alive? And where did the bloodstains come from?’

Track 2

## The Norwood Builder by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Chapter 4

'I searched the downstairs corridor yesterday,' Holmes said. 'The fingerprint wasn't there then. Someone put it there in the night. I guessed that Oldacre himself had done it. Obviously, the housekeeper was part of Oldacre's plan. She must have helped him. The small amount of blood in the bedroom is Oldacre's own blood, I think. He must have cut his finger. The housekeeper must have hidden Mr McFarlane's walking stick when he came here, so that he had to leave without it. Later, they put some blood on that too.'

'Do you remember that Mr McFarlane told us he helped Oldacre to seal some envelopes?' Holmes went on. 'I think that the old man made sure that Mr McFarlane pressed his finger into the hot wax. Then Oldacre made an impression of the impression with more wax, if you understand me. Last night, he used that impression and his own blood to make that fingerprint on the wall. It was a perfect copy of one of McFarlane's fingerprints. Mr Jonas Oldacre is a very clever and very wicked old man, Lestrade.'

'And how did you know about the hidden room?' Lestrade asked quietly.

'I knew that Jonas Oldacre must be hiding in the house,' Holmes replied. 'So first, I measured the outside of the house. I measured it when I was pacing in the garden with Watson. Then I **measured** the upstairs corridor in the same way. It was shorter than it should have been, so I guessed that there was a hidden room at the end of it. It was an easy thing for a builder like Oldacre to make.'

A few minutes later we were all downstairs again. Oldacre was still trying to tell us that he had only wanted to play a joke on young Mr McFarlane.

'Oh no, it wasn't a joke, Mr Oldacre,' Holmes said to him. 'Your building firm has done badly in the last few years. You owe money to a lot of people – your creditors. You wanted to disappear and escape from them. This year, you've paid a lot of money to someone called Cornelius. I'm sure that you are really Cornelius yourself. You planned to disappear and start your life again as Mr Cornelius, in a different part of England. Your housekeeper was planning to go with you. And, of course, you've hated Mrs McFarlane for thirty years, because she refused to marry you. So you decided to take revenge on her. You wanted her son to be executed. That is a serious crime, not a joke.'

'I'll take revenge on *you* for this, Sherlock Holmes,' Oldacre shouted.

'That will be difficult when you're in prison,' Holmes replied. 'I'm glad to have helped you, Lestrade,' he added, turning to the inspector. 'Come on, Watson. We must leave now.'

As we left the house, I asked Holmes about the remains in the burnt timber store – the pieces of burnt flesh.

'I expect they were rabbits, Watson,' Holmes said. 'We can never prove it. But when you write about this case, you can say that they were rabbits!'

### Glossary

**clue** an object or fact that someone discovers that helps them solve a crime or mystery  
**measure** to find the exact size, amount, speed, etc. of something, usually using a special tool or equipment (Here, Holmes uses his footsteps.)